

PLATE XXIV.—THE BLACK POPLAR AT BURY ST. EDMUND'S.

The poplar may be classed among the aquatic trees, though it will grow exceedingly well on ground comparatively dry. There are many species of the Poplar, the chief of which are the white, the black, and trembling, or aspen. Of these, the Black Poplar is the most scarce in England; it is oftener to be found in Cheshire and Suffolk, than in any other counties; and the accompanying specimen from Bury St. Edmund may probably challenge competition, both in size and beauty, with any other individual of its kind in the island. It stands near the old monastic bridge, which, with the little river Lark, that runs beneath it, reflecting the graceful branches of the Poplar in its waters, forms an interesting picture, that irresistibly attracts the attention of the traveller, as he enters the town by the road from Norwich.

The Poplar may be regarded in every respect as a classical tree. It was held sacred to Hercules by the ancients; and is celebrated by Homer, Virgil, and Ovid. The latter speaks of the transformation of the sisters of Phaeton into Poplars; and the fiction seems to wear almost the appearance of reality, from the number of those trees that still flourish on the banks of the Po in Italy, in the vicinity of the ancient Eridanus, into which the ambitious charioteer is said to have been precipitated by Jupiter. The Poplar, as well as other trees of the aquatic tribe, copiously exudes the moisture which it imbibes, insomuch that, in hot calm weather, its foliage like that of the Willow, is additionally grateful from the drops of water that hang upon its leaves, with the refreshing coolness of a summer shower; and which, to a poetical imagination, like that of Ovid, affords a picture of the tears of Phaeton's sisters for his loss, completing the beauty of the story which relates their metamorphosis.

The height of this tree is ninety feet, and its circumference, at a yard from the ground, fifteen; it rises forty-five feet, with but little diminution in size, when it divides into a profusion of luxuriant branches. The solid contents, by accurate measurement, are five hundred and fifty-one feet.

PLATE XXV.—THE COWTHORPE OAK.

This gigantic and venerable tree stands at the extremity of the village of Cowthorpe, near Wetherby, Yorkshire; in a retired field, sheltered on one side by the ancient church belonging to the place, and on another by a farm-house; the rural occupations of which exactly accord with the character of the Oak, whose arms are extended towards it, with a peculiar air of rustic vigour, retained even in decay; like some aged peasant whose toil-worn limbs still give evidence of the strength which enabled him to acquit himself of the labours of youth. It is mentioned by the late Doctor Hunter, in his edition of Evelyn's Sylva, in the following note: "Neither this, nor any of the others mentioned by Mr. Evelyn, bear any proportion to one now growing at Cowthorpe, near Wetherby, upon an estate belonging to the Right Hon. Lady Stourton. The dimensions are almost incredible. Within three feet of the surface, it measures sixteen yards, and close by the ground twenty-six yards. Its height in its primeval state (1776) is almost eighty-five feet, and its principal limb extends sixteen yards from the trunk. Throughout the whole tree, the foliage is extremely thin, so that the anatomy of the ancient branches is distinctly seen in the height of summer. When compared to this, all other trees are but children of the Forest."—Book III. page 500.

This description so nearly answers to the present state of the tree, that it does not appear to have suffered any considerable deprivation since the above period. In girth, indeed, it is inferior to the magnificent remains of the Oak in Salcey Forest; but altogether it is a noble and imposing ruin, on which it is impossible to look without entering into the wish suggested to an ingenious writer by the sight of a similar object, and poetically expressed in the following lines:

"When the huge trunk whose bare and forked arms
Pierced the mid sky, now prone, shall bud no more,
Still let the massy ruin, like the bones
Of some majestic hero be preserved
Unviolated and revered—
Whilst the gray father of the vale, at eve,

Returning from his sweltering summer task,
To tend the new-mown grass, or raise the sheaves
Along the western slope of yon gray hill,
Shall stop to tell his listening sons how far
She stretched around her thick-leaved ponderous boughs,
And measure out the space they shadowed."—DAVY.